



Trail Talk

Mission Trails Regional Park Trail Guide Program

Trail Talk Volume 14, Issue 9

Goings and Comings by Millie Basden, photo by Peter Thomas, Trail Guides

The nest boxes are empty now. Just a few months ago, they were busy places with house wrens and ash-throated flycatchers among the most likely occupants. The house wrens are still around, but as we move into September, the chance of seeing an ash-throated flycatcher in MTRP becomes slim. Other than a few individual birds who may stay all winter, the phainopepla that nested in the park may have departed by the time you read this. Where have they gone? When and how did they decide to go?

During the breeding season, ash-throated flycatchers can be found throughout the southwestern United States, and as far north as Oregon and southern Washington. Most ash-throated flycatchers spend the winter along the Pacific coast of Mexico and as far south as Honduras. Ash-throated flycatchers typically arrive in San Diego between March 15 and the end of April, although some migrants continue passing through on their way farther north until late in May. Most ash-throated flycatchers will have departed from the United States by mid-

September.

A bird is prompted to migrate because of a genetic predisposition and environmental triggers. The strongest environmental trigger seems to be the changing of the length of day and night.



Zugunruhe is a word that is younger than I am and was coined to describe the restlessness that caged songbirds will demonstrate each fall and spring at the time of peak migration. *Zugunruhe* can be brought on at other times of the year by artificially controlling the time of light and dark exposure. In June, an ash-throated flycatcher in San Diego was exposed to over 14 hours of daylight; by September, the hours of daylight have de-

creased to under 13. The birds don't announce that they have *zugunruhe*, but they do leave around the same time every year.

The phainopepla is also migratory, but follows a very different pattern than the ash-throated flycatcher. When phainopepla leave San Diego for the winter, they don't head south--they head east to the Sonoran Desert. Phainopepla breed in both their winter/desert range and in their summer/woodland range. Some scientists believe that the same birds raise young in the desert early in the year, then fly to their summer home and raise another brood.

Others believe that some birds are exclusively desert breeders and others are exclusively woodland breeders. Phainopepla are common in San Diego beginning in April or May and ending in September or October. The rest of the year, they are rare in San Diego, but common in the desert.

As the days shorten and fall descends, we may no longer

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Writers wanted...

- Have an interesting story or photo you'd like to share with other Trail Guides? Send them to 'Trail Talk' editor Millie Basden at trailtalkeditor@yahoo.com.

Speakers Needed...

- Have you heard an interesting speaker or know an interesting topic that would be appropriate for one of our monthly meetings? If so, please send your ideas to Brian or Ondina Moehl.



Next Trail Guide
Monthly Meeting:

Wednesday,
September 8th

6:30 pm—

Visitor Center
Classrooms

Monthly Meeting Minutes—August 11, 2010

There were 35 Trail Guides, 6 guests, and Ranger Heidi in attendance.

Fred's number for August was 2. The answer in the form of a question is "How many bald eagles have been sighted recently in Lakeside?" This number was from the Sign On San Diego web site <http://tiny.cc/wbd8k> (accessed 8/11/10). Fred's other number for August was 33. The answer in the form of a question is "How many official state symbols and mottos does California have?" He mentioned that the official state rock is serpentine. Because it contains asbestos, there is a current effort to remove it as the official state rock. An informal vote taken at the meeting was overwhelmingly in favor of keeping serpentine as California's official state rock.

Fred announced the prize winners for the best walk write-up in July: Christine McCoy, Karen Randall, Maureen Blackhall, and Mike Gibbs for their special walk on July 16.

Ranger Heidi mentioned that there is a water container on the white Trail Guide cabinet that can be taken on walks to give kids "birdie sips" if they did not bring water. She demonstrated the proper technique for administering "birdie sips."

Ranger Heidi also mentioned that she

would be trying to get a group of volunteers together to re-thatch the 'ewaa on the Visitor Center terrace.

Fred mentioned that Ranger Heidi and he refined the list of table topics and that the Foundation was going to seek a grant to fund materials for the tables.



Randy Hawley speaking at the August Meeting
Photo by Fred Kramer

Fred thanked Millie Basden for putting together the radio guide for Trail Guides. She not only wrote the directions, but also made the detailed drawings. Copies will be available at Trail Guide meetings. A copy is also posted on the radio cabinet in the copier room.

Fred mentioned that Chris Axtmann

had put a great write-up about our walks in the current issue of the *Mission Times Courier*.

Fred announced that there was a Trail Guide trek set for Sunday, October 3, to the San Diego Archaeological Society Museum in San Pasqual.

Audrey Baker discussed the "Great Pechanga Oak," thought to be the oldest coast live oak, perhaps as old as 2000 years. She is trying to arrange a visit through the Luiseno tribe that owns the land where the oak is located.

Program was a great presentation by former MTRP Senior Ranger Randy Hawley on the early days of MTRP. Afterwards, we had a campfire, roasted marshmallows, and made s'mores.

Upcoming Events

Wildlife Tracking Walk with Mike Gibbs, Saturday, September 4, 8:30–10:30 a.m. Meet in front of the Visitor Center.

The next meeting is September 8, 2010, 6:30 p.m. in the Visitor Center classrooms. Program will be a presentation on native bees by the San Diego Bee Association.

Respectfully submitted,

Linda L. Kramer, Secretary

Goings and Comings

(Continued from page 1)

see ash-throated flycatchers and phainopeplas, but in their place we will once again have the pleasure of the company of yellow-rumped warblers and white-crowned sparrows. Both of these species have been absent from San Diego while the ash-throated flycatchers were here. By the end of September, both will be common.

Most of the white-crowned sparrows that come to San Diego will have spent their summer in the far north, in Alaska and Canada. They will stay with us through the winter, and begin to leave again in April, and will be gone by mid-May.

Yellow-rumped warblers don't necessar-

ily go to the far north when they migrate from San Diego. They go to coniferous forests, but that may be as close as the mountains of California, or they may venture to more northerly regions of the United States and Canada. Yellow-rumped warblers stay around a little longer in the spring than the white-crowned sparrows, but they are usually gone by the first of June.

The comings and goings of migratory birds are one of the many interesting phenomena we can observe in MTRP.

Poole, A. Ed. *The Birds of North America Online*. Ithaca: Cornell Lab of Ornithology. <http://bna.birds.cornell.edu> Accessed on 8/21/10.

Unitt, Philip. *San Diego County Bird Atlas*. 2004. San Diego: San Diego Museum of Natural History.

Save the date...

Nancy Clement thought Trail Guides would be interested in this upcoming conference. More information will be in the October issue of *Trail Talk*.

Early San Diego Regional History Conference

November 6, 2010

8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Old Town Cultural and Historical Program Campus

3939 Conde Street, San Diego, CA 92110

This year's conference theme:

El Pueblo Perdido: The Lost Heritage of Early San Diego, Focusing on 1769 to 1848 and beyond.

From Monarchs to Bolas by Millie Basden, photos by Peter R. Thomas, Trail Guides

After the monarch larvae devoured the leaves of our milkweed plants and disappeared, we began searching our Tierasanta backyard for chrysalises. We found remnants of several from prior generations, and then stumbled upon a different sort of structure that we could not identify. Three gray and white mottled-looking round balls, a little smaller than gum balls, were suspended from a wooden beam of our patio cover. We noted what looked like a bird dropping



nearby, and I wondered how a bird had managed to poop on the underside of a beam, but I quickly dismissed the thought in my eagerness to investigate the three round balls.

Days later, we found no change in the balls, but a gentle nudge of the bird poop with the tip of a screw driver brought immediate responsive movement and we realized the “poop” was a spider!

Feeling like an alien had emerged from our chests, we went in search of information about this strange-looking life form. Our old field guide to spiders had a picture that resembled “our” spider, but it said that the bolas spider occurs only in the eastern part of the United States. Bill Howell and Google to the

rescue! An e-mail to Bill and our tentative identification was confirmed. We

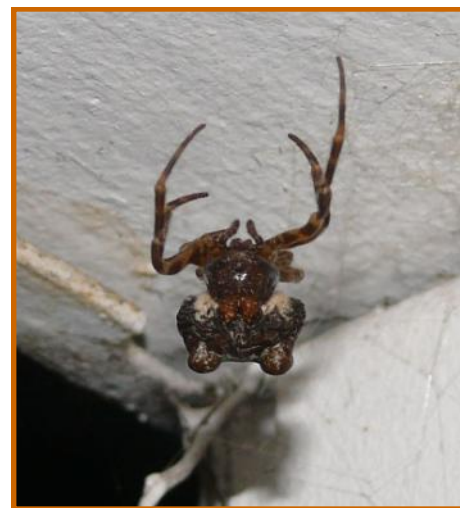


found a web site hosted by the University of California at Irvine, with information about the bolas spider that occurs in Southern California, *Mastophora cornigera*. Photos posted on the web site of egg sacs that looked just like ours were taken at a kiosk at the Muth Interpretive Center in Newport Beach, California. Our backyard is just 0.3 mile, as the crow flies, from the boundary of MTRP. It is not unlikely that bolas spiders are in the park, although I recently checked a kiosk on Calle de Vida and found some snail shells, but no spiders or egg sacs.

The bolas spider gets its name from a South American weapon: a rope connected to a ball which is thrown to capture an animal by entangling the animal's legs. Amazingly, a bolas spider makes a similar “weapon” from silk with a globule at the end that is swung at and snares moths flying nearby. The spider wraps the captured moth in silk and eats it. Pheromones are released by the spider to attract male moths. Video footage of the action from a David Attenborough documentary can be viewed

on YouTube; just search for “bolas spider.”

The female spider is much larger than the male. As we observed, she looks a lot like a bird dropping which allows her to spend the day in an exposed location; her predators don't eat bird poop. At night, the female begins to hunt. But we have found that our bolas spider is a late night gal. She begins to be active a little after dark, but she has not made a bolas before our bedtime. At 11:30 p.m., she can be found suspended from silk about 4 or 5 inches below the beam



where she rests during the day.

Maybe one of these nights we will catch her in the act of swinging her bolas. Even if we don't, it is enough to know that amazing things are going on in our backyard, and undoubtedly in MTRP as well.

Bryant, Peter J., “Spiders of Orange County and Nearby Places.” Univ. of Calif., Irvine, Dept. of Biology. <http://tiny.cc/aaypq> Accessed on August 28, 2010.

Prowling for Owls by Millie Basden, photos (and on page 4) by Terry Esterly, Trail Guides

“When you go owling, you have to be quiet.” This line from one of my favorite books for children would have been helpful to impress upon the participants at the annual MTRP Owl Prowl held on Friday, August 20, 2010. With over 70 people of all ages milling around, quiet was not part of the picture. Jeanne Raimond led the walk, and did an impressive job of corralling the group for an informative introduction complete with owl artifacts and recordings of owl calls. Although owls were the focal point, we also learned the call of common poorwills, and

some of the participants later heard poorwills calling in the distance.



“When you go owling, you don't need words, or warm, or anything but hope.” We hoped,

and we tried hard to find owls. On a scouting trip a few days earlier, Jeanne and the Esterlys had a Great Horned Owl fly very close overhead when they were in the vicinity of the dam. But the night of the Owl Prowl, all of our hoping did not produce an owl. “I was not disappointed. My brothers all said, sometimes there's an owl, and sometimes there isn't.”

Quoted text is from the book, *Owl Moon*, by Jane Yolen. (published 1987, by Philomel Books, New York).

What's Happening at the Park

Friday, September 10...

Stars at Mission Trails—Join members of the San Diego Astronomy Association from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. at the Kumeyaay Lake Campground's Day Use Parking Lot. Telescopes available (weather permitting.)

Saturday, September 18...

Bird Walk—Join Trail Guide Jeanne Raimond for an adventure in bird watching! We'll meet at the Old Mission Dam parking lot. 8:00 a.m.

Saturday, September 18...

Summer Twilight Walk—We conclude this season's Trail Guide Summer Twilight Walks at the Kumeyaay Lake Campground entry station. Come and enjoy an evening walk in the park and learn what occurs during dusk and as the sun goes down. 6:00 p.m.

Saturday, September 25...

Birding Basics—Resident birder Winona Sollock will teach 5 simple techniques for identifying birds at a glance. Bring binoculars and your field guide if you have them. 1 p.m. to 2:30 p.m., Visitor Center.

Saturday, October 2...

Tracking Walk—Join MTRP Trail Guide and Tracking Team member Mike Gibbs and discover signs left behind by resident creatures along the Oak Grove Loop. Meet at the Visitor Center. 8:30 a.m.

Sunday, October 3

Trail Guide Trek—to the San Diego Archaeological Society Museum in San Pasqual.

Crowded Owl Prowl



Trail Guide Jeanne Raimond led over 70 energetic guests on an informative trek for owls, Friday, August 20th. While no owls were sighted, some visitors heard the distant call of the common poorwills. Story on page 3.



If you can't do a walk you signed-up for, arrange for someone to take your place or let Fred or Ranger Heidi know you won't be there.



The Harvest Moon is the full moon closest to the fall equinox. It was thus named because it rises within a half-hour of when the sun sets. In early days, when farmers had no tractors, it was essential that they work by the light of the moon to bring in the harvest. This moon looks very large and gives a lot of light throughout the entire night. No other lunar spectacle is as awesome as the Harvest Moon. -Harvest Moon Lore

The morrow was a bright
September morn;

The earth was beautiful as
if newborn;

There was that nameless
splendor everywhere,

That wild exhilaration in the
air,

Which makes the passers in the
city street

Congratulate each other as they
meet.

- Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Mission Trails Regional Park Trail Guide Program

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The Trail Guide Program is dedicated to provide the visiting public with education and understanding of the unique environmental and historical attributes of Mission Trails Regional Park. The Trail Guides supplement the Park Rangers in outreach programs to the public.
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